

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 130375

FOL BANGKOK 14363 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO CANBERRA GENEVA
HONG KONG JAKARTA KUALA LUMPUR MANILA OTTAWA SINGAPORE PARIS
MAY 19, 1978 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14363

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: REFUGEE MOTIVATIONS FOR LEAVING VIETNAM

1. SUMMARY: AN EMBASSY OFFICER INTERVIEWED SEVERAL
RECENTLY ARRIVED SONGKHLA REFUGEES FROM HO CHI MINH CITY
CONCERNING THEIR MOTIVATIONS FOR LEAVING VIETNAM. ALL OF THEM
SPOKE OF THE SEVERE DISLOCATIONS AND HARSHIPS RESULTING FROM
THE SRV MARCH 23 ORDER WHICH NATIONALIZED ALL BUSINESS ACTIV-
ITIES AND PROVIDED FOR THE MASS MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE FROM THE
CITY TO NEW ECONOMIC ZONES, PRIMARILY IN THE MEKONG DELTA.
STEPPED UP MILITARY CONSCRIPTION OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WAS
ALSO A FACTOR. DESPITE THE CURRENTLY HIGH ARRIVAL RATES
ALONG THE ASIAN LITTORAL, THE REFUGEES CONTEND THAT ESCAPE
FROM VIETNAM IS BECOMING MORE DIFFICULT. END SUMMARY.

2. GOVERNMENT CADRE ON MARCH 23 BEGAN A SYSTEMATIC INVENTORY
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OF ALL PRIVATELY OWNED PROPERTY, AND ANNOUNCED THAT ALL PRIVATE
BUSINESSES, INCLUDING SMALL MARKET VENDORS, SHOULD CEASE
COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IMMEDIATELY. IN MID-APRIL CADRE BEGAN
CONFISCATING AND TRASFERRING TO GOVERNMENT STORES PROPERTY
WHICH THEY BELIEVED WAS BEING HELD FOR RESALE. STAPLE GOODS
ARE BEING RESOLD IN THE GOVERNMENT STORES ON A RATIONED BASIS,
WHILE LUXURY GOODS ARE AVAILABLE ONLY TO A SMALL, APPROVED GROUP

OF CADRE AND FOREIGNERS. BUSINESSMEN ARE NOW LIVING ON THEIR SAVINGS OR OFF OF SMALL-SCALE BLACK MARKET ACTIVITIES. THE CESSATION OF PRIVATE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES HAS LEFT PERHPAPS 50-60 PERCENT OF THE HO CHI MINH CITY POPULATION WITHOUT ANY LEGAL MEANS OF SUPPORT, AND HAS CAUSED SEVERE SHORTAGES OF BASIC FOODSTUFFS.

3. REFUGEES REPORT THAT IN LATE APRIL THERE WERE SEVERE SHORTAGES OF RICE, VEGETABLES, FISH, AND MEAT. GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS STIPULATE THAT EACH PERSON CAN BUY NINE KILOGRAMS OF RICE PER MONTH AT THE OFFICIAL PRICE OF 40 CENTS PER KILOGRAM (LESS THAN ONE HALF PIASTER PER ILO-GRAM), BUT IN FACT ONLY ABOUT THREE KILOGRAMS OF RICE PER MONTH IS AVAILABLE AT THE RATIONED PRICE. MOST PEOPLE ARE SUPPLEMENTING THEIR INADEQUATE RICE RATION WITH SWEET POTATOES OR ARE PURCHASING RICE ON THE BLACK MARKET FOR ABOUT EIGHT PIASTERS PER KILOGRAM. MEAT IS AVAILABLE ON THE BLACK MARKET FOR 15-20 PIASTERS PER KILOGRAM, BUT IS VIRTUALLY INACCESSIBLE TO MOST GOVERNMENT CADRE OR SKILLED WORKMEN WHOSE SALARIES RANGE FROM 40-120 PIASTERS PER MONTH.

4. THE MARCH 23 ORDER ALSO STIPULATED THAT ALL BUSINESSMEN, FORMER MILITARY OR GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL, AND 1954 REFUGEES FROM NORTH VIETNAM WOULD BE MOVED TO ONE OF THE NEW ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THOSE WHO VOLUNTEER TO GO TO ONE OF THE NEW ZONES WILL BE ALLOWED TO PICK THE LOCATION AND
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TAKE SMALL ITEMS OF PERSONAL PROPERTY WITH THEM. FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT VOLUNTEER, THE GOVERNMENT WILL SELECT A RELOCATION SITE FOR THEM, AND WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO TAKE ANY SIGNIFICANT PERSONAL PROPERTY WITH THEM. THE REFUGEES REPORT THAT ONLY 2-3 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE AFFECTED HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO RELOCATE. THE VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE HAVE FILED REQUESTS FOR POSTPONEMENT OR EXCEPTIONS TO THE ORDER TO RELOCATE. THEY ESTIMATED THAT FEWER THAN 100,000 PEOPLE HAD RELOCATED BY THE END OF APRIL. THE REFUGEES ARE CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO ACCELERATE THE RELOCATIONS IN MAY AND JUNE, AND THT PERHAPS 60-70 PERCENT OF THE CITY POPULATION WILL BE AFFECTED.

5. WHILE STILL IN VIETNAM, THE REFUGEES RECEIVED NEWS FROM PEOPLE WHO HAD RECENTLY RELOCATED IN THE NEW ZONES. THEY REPORTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD DONE LITTLE PLANNING FOR THEIR RELOCATION. IN GENERAL, THEY HAD BEEN MOVED TO REMOTE AREAS WITH POOR SOIL, INADEQUATE OR NONEXISTANT MEDICAL SUPPLIES, NO SCHOOLS, NO SHOPS, AND WITHOUT PROVISION OF EVEN BASIC FARMING IMPLEMENTS.

6. MOST SONGKHLA REFUGEES POINTED TO THE INEVITABILITY OF THEIR HAVING TO RELOCATE UNDER SUCH HARSH CONDITIONS AS THE PRIMARY

REASON FOR THEIR LEAVING VIETNAM. THEY ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS STEPPED UP MILITARY CONSCRIPTION OF YOUNG MALES AND FEMALES BETWEEN 18 AND 25 YEARS OF AGE. RECRUITS ARE PAID FOUR PIASTERS PER MONTH, ABOUT ENOUGH TO BUY A TUBE OF TOOTHPASTE, AND ARE GENERALLY SENT TO REMOTE AREAS TO CUT FIREWOOD OR WORK ON NEW FARMING OR IRRIGATION SCHEMES.

7. THE REFUGEES ALSO EXPRESSED THEIR BELIEF THAT IT IS BECOMING MORE DIFFICULT TO ESCAPE FROM VIETNAM. MOST PEOPLE'S SAVINGS ARE BEING RAPIDLY DEPLETED, AND BUYING ONE'S WAY OUT IS THUS MORE DIFFICULT. COASTAL PATROLS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INCREASED, AND THE REFUGEES ESTIMATE THAT ONLY TEN PERCENT OF THE REFUGEE BOATS THAT TRY TO LEAVE VIETNAM ARE SUCCESSFUL IN REACHING A SAFE HAVEN. THE PRESUMPTION OF THE REFUGEES
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IS THAT MOST ARE APPREHENDED ON THE BEACH OR IN VIETNAMESE COASTAL WATERS. WHITEHOUSE UNQUOTE VANCE

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